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## Spring 2024 Introduction

Jason Olsen  
*Utah State University - Eastern*

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# INTRODUCTION

Jason Olsen, Ph.D.

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This Spring 2024 issue marks the end of my tenure with the Journal of Empowering Teaching Excellence (JETE). I started my affiliation with JETE as a member of the editorial board in fall 2018 and served as the assistant editor, taking over as editor-in-chief in fall 2022. Over this time, I've had the remarkable good fortune to work with wonderful editors, reviewers, and researchers. I have been fortunate to play a role in essential conversations about teaching in higher education. Those conversations are always meaningful, but considering my time as editor occurred during a period of serious upheaval due to COVID-19 and against the backdrop of polarizing conversations about teaching theories such as Critical Race Theory, the role of a journal dedicated to teaching in higher education is even more important than we could have realized when the journal began back in 2017. This journal has grown exponentially in audience and scope and will continue to grow.

I was lucky to be mentored by Kim Hales, the editor-in-chief when I first joined the journal. Kim's passion for teaching and love of theory were crucial in the journal's development, and I've dedicated my time to help build this journal she taught me to love. Nichelle Frank, our current assistant editor, is the incoming editor-in-chief, and the journal couldn't be in better hands. Nichelle is a brilliant teacher and thinker who will help JETE's continued relevance. I've made many other friends on the journal journey, including Shelley Arnold, Travis Thurston, and the rest of the wonderful team at the Center for Empowering Teaching Excellence (ETE) at Utah State University. Neal Legler's numerous contributions have also been crucial to our success, as have all of the members of the JETE editorial board.

As I look back at my time with JETE, I think about what I've learned and how this knowledge has helped me in my teaching. Obviously, I can speak endlessly about specific knowledge I've gained. This issue contains several articles that enhance and empower my teaching (and will do the same for you!). Emily Holtz (University of Tennessee) and Stephanie Moody (Towson University) bring us "The Role of Literature in Science: How the Science of Teaching Reading has Changed Children's Literature in Preservice Teacher Coursework," an exploration of how policy reforms in Texas have affected how teacher education programs approach teaching children's literature to preservice teachers. This article shows the ways programs must pivot to provide valuable learning for students (and, in this case, those students' eventual students) while still adhering to the guidelines that have been established. This article is about creating opportunities from challenges, something we can all learn from.

Gaby Bedetti (Eastern Kentucky University) writes "Reinvigorating the Post-COVID Gen Z English Major," an article that delves into strategies that best reach and impact Gen Z students. While Bedetti's work focuses on English majors (and provides valuable conversation about the state of that field), all educators will learn from her study of various methodologies and which are most effective for reaching Gen Z students. The article does what any thoughtful article on teaching should do—it asks me to consider my strategies and assess whether my methods are the best possible approaches I could take, and then it provides new possibilities based on research.

Finally, I learned a lot from the research Kelsey Hall (Utah State University) and Katherine Starzec (Kansas State University) put into their article, "Using an Interrupted Case Study to Engage Undergraduates' Critical Thinking Style and Enhance Content Knowledge." Primarily, I learned how active learning best serves undergraduate students and how those students evaluate different teaching methods. We are so proud to consistently share this kind of research in this journal—specific, grounded research that gives teachers insight into how various methods can work in the classroom.

So, yes, every article I've published has taught me something, and each of those things has helped shape me into a

better teacher. I've learned that teaching isn't just about theory, but it isn't simply about emotional attachment to craft and students. It's about all of these things. Teachers who care about their students but don't think about how research and theory can help them serve those students are not going to educate those students as well as they had hoped. And a teacher who is well-versed in theory but doesn't invest in student well-being isn't going to be the best teacher they can be. This journal gives us the tools to understand how higher-ed teaching is evolving and what we can do to keep up. The research from the outstanding educators both in this issue of JETE and always is an essential step toward serving our students. The next step—investing our hearts in their growth and well-being—that's entirely up to us.